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SUBJECT: A FEW FINAL REFLECTIONS

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11. (C) Rather than reiterate previous analyses, I shall offer a few closing reflections in shorthand form.

-- The situation in Zimbabwe today is best defined as a "FROZEN TRANSITION," a political crisis whose lack of resolution affects and deepens all of Zimbabwe's other crises, economic, social, and humanitarian. Notwithstanding this fact, 80-year old Robert Mugabe is probably more entrenched than he has been in several years and is unlikely to be dislodged by pressure or persuasion from the West, African governments, the Zimbabwean opposition or population, or his own colleagues and support structure. While there is certainly competition within ZANU-PF, Mugabe has taken none of the steps he could to facilitate an orderly transition, thereby ensuring substantial uncertainty and perhaps instability in the event of his sudden death or serious illness.

-- Mugabe is not dotty; he pays attention to those things he chooses to focus on and pretends not to see those things he does not want to. He is driven less by money than by vanity and fear of the consequences of "dismounting from the tiger he is riding." He remains a skilled politician and uses all means, fair and foul, to stay in power at all costs. His unrivaled and unquestioned power within ZANU-PF sucks the oxygen out of the party, which remains largely a self-absorbed, paralyzed institution incapable of addressing, or even debating the nation's myriad real problems.

-- Mugabe, the state security apparatus and ZANU-PF's instruments of repression and intimidation have succeeded for now in convincing the public once again that there is no alternative to Mugabe's rule and that they will be given no opportunity to choose a different future. In the face of these multiple pressures, most Zimbabweans have opted for submission, emigration or waiting until Mugabe dies. Unless political space reopens substantially, most Zimbabweans seem unwilling to take the risks of opposition politics or mass action.

-- The political opposition is down, but not out. The MDC still reflects the will of many, and probably most Zimbabweans if they thought their choice was free and could matter. Next year's parliamentary elections provide the MDC a better opportunity to preserve some strength than recent by-elections where ZANU-PF has been able to address all its attention to individual constituency by-elections. The MDC has done well to hold together under the pressure of state repression, infiltration and intimidation, but it faces new and difficult challenges to maintain itself and stay united for the long haul since its prospects are dim of coming to power or even being allowed to exercise the shares of power it has won in the parliament, mayoralities and municipal councils.

-- Because Mugabe is only focused on remaining in power and has learned that he can withstand sanctions, isolation and even sharp economic decline, the Mugabe Regime will continue to defy criticism from the West and seek to capitalize domestically and in Africa by playing the nationalist and anti-imperialist cards. The GOZ is also facing increased criticism from within Africa, although most is expressed in private or in polite terms. The Regime appears willing to do battle with its critics, even in Africa, as witness state media critiques of Nigeria and other West Africans deemed to have been unsupportive and regular tirades against Botswana. Mugabe's reliance on backing from fellow Africans is an increasingly most vulnerable area, however, and would be even more important if the South African Government were willing to take a stronger stand in favor of crisis resolution.

-- Mugabe shows little interest in re-engagement with the West on other than his own terms and Mugabe and ZANU-PF radicals seem inclined to run the 2005 parliamentary elections as a referendum against Prime Minister Tony Blair, a clear indication of the absence of any substantive campaign theme. Others in ZANU-PF, Reserve Bank Governor Gono and even the Armed Forces have expressed interest in reengagement because of their frustration over their exclusion from traditional Western cooperation. Accordingly, avoiding direct confrontation and focusing our attention on what the GOZ must

do on election reform for positive reengagement are useful messages for regional leaders and also for the more moderate voices in ZANU-PF.

-- HIV and AIDS remain an enormous crisis for Zimbabwe's present and future, aggravated by Zimbabwe's economic crisis, food deficit, emigration of health professionals and decline of the health system and by Zimbabwe's political leadership's diminished ability to lead the nation. Nonetheless, Zimbabwe has some advantages in a still adequate and reasonably dispersed health system and those talented health professionals who do remain in country, as well as a populace which is used to reasonably good health care and might respond well if outside financing was available to provide substantial treatment to HIV and AIDS victims.

-- Food shortages are somewhat less than in the past several years, but still loom as a major threat in the months ahead to the most vulnerable Zimbabweans. Yet GOZ insistence that Zimbabwe has produced a bumper harvest as a result of the land redistribution program and GOZ refusal to request assistance threatens the lives of many Zimbabweans within several months. It is not sufficient for us to say we will not allow hunger when we do not have the means to assist and would likely take several months to deliver food, should the GOZ belatedly make a request. Instead, I urge that we be pro-active in forcing a report by UN agencies (WFP and FAO) to the UNSC Security Council in an effort to stimulate a GOZ request, or alternatively, identify where responsibility lies for upcoming food shortages.

-- Emigration is the under-estimated phenomenon in Zimbabwe's crisis in a country that had very little emigration of its black population from 1980 until very recently. Now, however, as many as a quarter of Zimbabwe's population is living outside the country, relieving somewhat the burden on Zimbabwe's shrinking economy and sending home remittances to sustain their families in Zimbabwe, but also representing an enormous millstone around Zimbabwe's future. Sixty per cent of accountants, 80 per cent of medical school graduates, most experienced agronomists, many of the country's best judges and human rights lawyers are emigrating. How many or how few return depends on how long the crisis persists and on a return to positive economic and political prospects. And if these emigrants do not return, Zimbabwe's recovery will be that much more difficult.

12. Conclusions: The above depressing picture coincides with the national mood of depression, which in turn contrasts sharply with the excessive optimism that most black and white Zimbabweans exhibited several years ago. Unfortunately, everything still seems to depend on Mugabe, and how short or long Zimbabwe's national crisis lasts likely depends on how long Mugabe insists on staying in unfettered control. And how rapid and complete a recovery can be depends on how much longer Zimbabwe's national crisis persists. Zimbabwe's own population has mostly opted to flee rather than fight; Zimbabwe's near neighbors appear to hold the best prospect for avoiding indefinite prolongation of Zimbabwe's national agony. I urge that we engage deeply and creatively with Southern African Governments to help find a way forward.

SULLIVAN